



BLM News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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City of Mesquite Hazardous Fuel Reduction Environmental Assessment Available for Public Comment

Las Vegas – The City of Mesquite Hazardous Fuels Reduction Environmental Assessment is now available for public comment through 5 p.m. Tuesday, August 26. The 1,709-acre project is a pilot in President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative that directs the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Interior and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to develop administrative and legislative measures that will help reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire to America's forests and rangelands.

The project was selected as one of 10 initial national pilot projects because the adjacent communities of Bunkerville and Mesquite, Nevada are among the fastest growing in the nation and are spread along a 10-mile-long wildland urban interface with the Virgin River floodplain. Tamarisk has invaded the Virgin River floodplain and poses a serious fire fuels threat to these rapidly populating communities. This introduced Eurasian tree forms dense, flammable thickets that have largely replaced the native riparian vegetation of the Virgin River, which historically experienced only low-intensity, infrequent wildfires.

"The City of Mesquite Fuels Project is part of a long-term program whose ultimate goal is to restore the Virgin River riparian and aquatic environment, by removing the invasive noxious plant tamarisk and re-establishing the native grasses, shrubs and cottonwood-willow vegetation,"

according to Tim Rash, BLM Fire Ecologist. "What is especially exciting is that our tamarisk

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fuels treatments on the Virgin River will achieve the core goal of protecting human life and property within the Bunkerville/Mesquite urban wildland interface zone, while also contributing toward numerous important natural resource objectives. These include restoration of the largest riparian system in Clark County; the control of a noxious weed infestation; increased availability of surface groundwater; enhanced biodiversity and productivity; improved habitat conditions for migratory bird species and for federally-listed threatened or endangered species; and restoration of the natural low-intensity, low frequency wildfire regime.”

The City of Mesquite project is expected to last about 10 years. Tamarisk treatments will include removal by hand and mechanical techniques, followed by herbicide spraying of any tamarisk resprouts. All tamarisk-cleared acres will be monitored for treatment effectiveness and to detect re-infestation by noxious weed species. The sites will receive revegetation treatment (broadcast seeding; tree plantings; etc) until the native riparian species dominance has been re-established. The project includes both public and private lands. Project implementation is anticipated to start in the fall of 2003, with an anticipated average treatment schedule of 100-250 acres per year.

Because six listed species occur in the project’s area of effect, the BLM designed the City of Mesquite project in close consultation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to ensure that the proposed treatments would be “not likely to adversely affect” any of these local populations or their designated critical habitats. The federally-listed threatened or endangered species include: desert tortoise, Yuma clapper rail, yellow-billed cuckoo, Southwestern willow flycatcher, Virgin River chub and woundfin.

The Environmental Assessment is available at the Las Vegas Field Office (4701 North Torrey Pines) and online at www.nv.blm.gov/vegas.

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